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#### U.S. EPA STARTS SUPERFUND CLEANUP AT MINE ON DOE LEASE TRACT

(San Francisco)--The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (U.S. DOE) today announced the start of an emergency cleanup of radioactive uranium mine waste on a lease tract controlled by U.S. DOE at the Bluewater Mine Sites near Prewitt, New Mexico. Under an interagency agreement, U.S. EPA will conduct the cleanup and will be reimbursed by U.S. DOE.

"The cleanup of this site is an example of the cooperation between federal agencies and the U.S. DOE commitment to conduct its business in an environmentally sound manner," said James Bickel, Program Manager for Special Operations at U.S. DOE's regional office in Albuquerque, N.M.

"When this work is completed, the Bluewater Uranium Mine Sites will no longer threaten the health of the residents of adjacent Navajo Nation lands," said U.S. EPA Regional Administrator Daniel W. McGovern.

Elevated radiation levels recorded at the mine sites have posed a serious health threat to people who live in the vicinity, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). At the Navajo Nation's request, the U.S. EPA conducted an accelerated cleanup at two of the sites, which are on Indian allotted land, last Fall. An adjacent mine site on privately owned land was also cleaned up last fall by a group of private companies, in accordance with an administrative order issued by U.S. EPA. Cleanup of the DOE site, however, was delayed due to a legal dispute which arose between DOE and the leaseholder of the parcel.

The work will include sealing mine openings, and moving and

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covering mine waste. All bulldozed areas will be revegetated with grasses and sloped to resist erosion. Radiation monitoring will be conducted after the cleanup to ensure that radiation levels have been reduced to levels deemed safe by both U.S. EPA and U.S. DOE.

U.S. EPA has chosen Laguna Construction Co., a firm wholly owned and operated by the Pueblo of Laguna Indians, to perform the work under U.S. EPA oversight. The firm was chosen for its outstanding track record on uranium mine reclamation projects, including previous work at the Bluewater sites and the Jackpile Mine, which is the world's largest open-pit uranium mine. The current work is expected to take two to three weeks and cost about \$275,000.

The cleanup of the DOE site is authorized under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund) and Presidential Executive Order 12580. That executive order expressly delegates to DOE the responsibility for conducting Superfund cleanup actions on lands that are subject to DOE's "jurisdiction, custody, or control." The Department has acknowledged that the land in question is under its jurisdiction. However, due to the need for a timely response at the Bluewater site, DOE has requested assistance from U.S. EPA in conducting the reclamation work there.

Since 1980, U.S. EPA has completed over 3,000 emergency response actions. The Superfund emergency response program covers imminent threats to human health and the environment. These situations range from acute, life-threatening hazardous substance spills to complex situations involving improper management of hazardous waste.

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